

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 002896

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SUBJECT: EGYPT: COS WEHEBA AND CENTCOM DEPUTY COMMANDER REVIEW COOPERATION ON BRIGHT STAR EXERCISES, IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN

Classified by Charge Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Meeting with Egyptian Chief of Staff Weheba on April 13, senior U.S. military commanders led by Deputy CENTCOM Commander LTG Smith agreed that plans for BRIGHT STAR 2005 were on track. Weheba hoped to invite Congressional observers to that exercise. Weheba welcomed an apparent downturn in violence in Iraq, reiterating Egypt's offer to train more Iraqi soldiers. He said the Iraqi military needed U.S. advice to develop an effective force structure and training regime. Weheba also reiterated Egypt's commitment to donate more arms and ammunition to the Afghan army, without offering to help transport this material from Egypt due to "limited" airlift capacity. LTG Smith emphasized the symbolic value of Egyptian participation in the airlift effort. In closing, Weheba appealed for DoD support in explaining Egypt's military contributions to the U.S. Congress. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) CENTCOM Deputy Commander LTG Smith, joined by ARCENT Commander LTG Whitcomb and BRIGHT STAR lead planner MG Comstock, met with Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces Weheba in Cairo April 13. Reviewing the status of BRIGHT STAR planning (and the ongoing National Force Commanders Conference associated with that exercise), these senior officers agreed that BRIGHT STAR this fall will showcase a high degree of military cooperation among the various participants. LTG Whitcomb noted that the U.S. and Egypt worked as "one team in concert" planning this exercise. Weheba encouraged the attendance of U.S. Congressional observers for portions of the exercise and reiterated that Iraq and Afghanistan were welcome as observers.

¶3. (C) Discussing a welcome downturn in violence in Iraq, Weheba asked about reports of some coalition members pulling troops out of Iraq. LTG Smith noted the need to focus on training of Iraqi security forces and hoped that some nations might shift their participation to training missions rather than pulling out altogether. Regarding Egypt's offer to train Iraqi forces, LTG Smith said the Iraqi MoD was inclined to pursue training programs in Iraq where possible; overseas training offers were often judged on cost. Weheba said "we have given our offer and are waiting." LTG Smith emphasized the utility of Iraqi forces seeing how a professional military operated in another Arab country. He also stressed USG hopes that efforts to build the leadership structure of the Iraqi military would be complemented with continuity in that leadership -- without frequent changes in the military structure each time a new political leadership took control.

¶4. (C) Weheba said the Iraqi military needed U.S. advice as it structured its new military and trained its forces. He felt that various training offers from European states should complement "strong U.S. advice on force structure" to avoid a piecemeal approach. LTG Whitcomb cited the value of BRIGHT STAR as one of many opportunities for Iraq to observe effective military training and planning. Weheba said Egypt needed U.S. advice regarding how to deal with Iraq, as Egyptians often failed to understand the ethnic animosities and other internal dynamics of their Iraqi neighbors. Weheba was optimistic that there were "no obvious divisions" in the new Iraqi government, yet cautioned that internal divisions in a military could divert attention from the crucial goal of developing defensive capabilities.

¶5. (C) The Chief of Staff reiterated Egypt's offer to donate more arms and ammunition to the Afghan National Army. (In a subsequent conversation, a close advisor of the Minister of Defense stressed to Embassy personnel that the MoD wanted the U.S. to begin transporting these shipments soon.) Weheba was less forthcoming, however, when asked whether Egypt might assist in the airlift effort to deliver the materiel to Afghanistan. LTG Smith emphasized the value of Egypt assuming one or two of the dozen sorties that would be required in the operation. Weheba quipped that he would have to fly commercial if he visited Afghanistan, stating that Egypt did not have the airlift capacity to entertain many overseas missions. "C-130's are very limited," he said. LTG Smith cited the importance of a strong Egyptian signal to Washington (and a powerful visual of Egyptian aircraft on site in Afghanistan) to bolster U.S. appreciation for Egypt's contributions to Afghan reconstruction.

16. (C) Turning the conversation to Congressional perceptions of Egypt's contribution to regional stability, Weheba said that delegations visiting the MoD were usually laudatory of Egyptian efforts. "We can't talk to all" the members of Congress, he lamented, appealing to the USG to help tell the story of Egypt's contribution. "We count on you" to raise awareness in Washington, he concluded.

17. (U) LTG Smith did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before departing Cairo.

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GRAY